



**Department of Justice
U.S. Attorney's Office
Southern District of Texas**

Donald J. DeGabrielle, Jr. • United States Attorney

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

APRIL 19, 2006

WWW.USDOJ.GOV/USAO/TXS

JOHN YEMBRICK

PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICE

(713) 567-9388

SUGARLAND MAN INDICTED IN WHEELCHAIR SCAM

HOUSTON, TX – Anthony Ekpe Etim, 53, of Sugarland, Texas, has been indicted and charged with health care fraud, conspiracy, wire fraud and money laundering resulting from a joint investigation being conducted by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) with the assistance of the Houston Medicaid Fraud Control Unit of the Office of the Texas Attorney General into what has become known as the “motorized wheelchair fraud scheme.” United States Attorney Don DeGabrielle today announced the unsealing of the 12 count indictment, returned under seal yesterday by a Houston grand jury, following Etim’s arrest this morning by investigating agents.

Etim was arrested at his home located on the 2000 block of Holly Glade Lane in Sugarland, Texas, and is expected to make an initial appearance before United States Magistrate Judge Mary Milloy at 3:00 p.m. today.

According to allegations in the indictment, beginning in approximately 2000, Etim opened a durable medical equipment company called Makey Medical Sales and Supplies, which was last located on the 7400 block of Harwin Drive in Houston. Etim is accused of purchasing prescriptions and Certificates of Medical Necessity (CMN) from marketers for \$500 to approximately \$1,000 each. CMNs are needed for a claim to be processed and paid by Medicare and Medicaid. The CMN is signed by the physician and certifies that the patient’s medical condition requires a motorized wheelchair.

Etim billed Medicare, according to the indictment, for costly motorized wheelchairs and related accessories, but in actuality, delivered less expensive scooters to the patients. Wheelchairs and their accessories were reimbursed at a rate of approximately \$6,000; scooters cost between \$800 and \$1,200. Ekim is accused of billing patients for enteral supply kits, but did not deliver them. Enteral supply kits are used to deliver nutrition to the patient. Over a period of about one year, Etim billed Medicare \$1.5 million and was ultimately paid approximately \$1 million.

Upon conviction, each of the six counts of health care fraud carries a maximum penalty of 10 years imprisonment. Each of the two counts of wire fraud carries a maximum penalty of 20 years imprisonment upon conviction. The sole count of conspiracy to commit health care fraud and wire fraud carries a maximum penalty of five years imprisonment. All of these charges also carry a maximum fine of \$250,000.

The three counts of money laundering each carry a maximum penalty of 20 years imprisonment and a \$500,000 fine or twice the value of the property involved in the transaction, whichever is greater, upon conviction.

An indictment or an information is a formal accusation of criminal conduct, not evidence. A defendant is presumed innocent unless and until convicted through due process of law.

#